

[Date of Mailing]

Dear Current or Former Yucca Mountain Project Worker:

This letter comes to you as a follow up to the Department of Energy (DOE) announcement regarding the establishment of a voluntary Silicosis Screening Program for current and former Yucca Mountain Project workers. Specifically, the program is being offered to current and former workers who were involved in tunneling and underground operations as well the set-up of experimental studies in the Exploratory Studies Facility from 1992 to present.

Initiation of this Silicosis Screening Program is DOE management's response to the efforts of a former employee who brought the matter to the attention of DOE management. The former employee is to be commended for pursuing the issue.

This program applies to an estimated 1,200 to 1,500 workers who may have been exposed to airborne silica in the tunnel at various times during tunnel mining operations. Until 1996, respiratory protection was available, but requirements for its use were not consistently applied.

Silica is one of the minerals that naturally exist in the desert soils and in the rocks at Yucca Mountain. Silica can become airborne during dust-producing activities such as tunnel boring operations. If inhaled, silica can collect in the respiratory system and, with long-term exposure, can cause a chronic, progressive lung disease called silicosis. The most visible symptoms of this disease are coughing and shortness of breath.

Under an existing contract, the University of Cincinnati will conduct the medical screening program for current and former Yucca Mountain underground workers, free of cost to the workers. The university is experienced in this kind of medical screening and has conducted similar screening programs for DOE at other locations across the country.

The University of Cincinnati will be contacting Yucca Mountain Project underground workers to offer each one an opportunity to participate in the screening program, which would include a telephone interview followed by a physical examination of each participant.

We believe that offering this screening is the right thing to do and that the current measures in place at the Yucca Mountain site are protecting today's workers.

In 1996, ventilation in the tunnel was improved to control dust levels, and enhanced monitoring was instituted for silica and airborne fibrous materials. Additionally, our records indicate that the proper use of respiratory protection requirements has been rigorously followed and documented since 1996.

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In 1998, we established the Silica Protection Program for Exploratory Studies Facility workers who spend more than 20 days a year underground. You may be currently enrolled in this medical surveillance program, which involves chest X-rays, spirometer analysis, and medical exams. The Silica Protection Program has identified two cases of silicosis to date.

It is expected that current workers will continue to participate in the ongoing Silica Protection Program but will have the option of also participating in the University of Cincinnati's screening program. The toll-free number for the Silicosis Screening Program to be conducted by the University of Cincinnati is 1-866-716-1542.

Sincerely,

(Signature on file)

W. John Arthur III
Deputy Director